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“Pamela D. Heilman has been a beacon of inspiration to our Law School community.”
– Interim Dean James A. Gardner

With Jaeckle Award, a pioneer gets her due

A longtime booster of SUNY Buffalo Law School and the University at Buffalo, and a boundary-breaking female lawyer in the Western New York legal community, received the Law School’s highest honor in a Jan. 30 ceremony.

Pamela Davis Heilman ’75, a leader in cross-border business practice with the Hodgson Russ law firm, accepted the 2015 Edwin F. Jaeckle Award during a presentation at the Union League Club in New York City. The presentation was made in conjunction with the school’s annual New York City alumni luncheon.

Heilman, a longtime member of the Law School’s Dean’s Advisory Council, for six years also has served on the UB Council. In that role she was part of the search committee that selected Satish K. Tripathi as UB’s 15th president.

Introduced by Dean’s Advisory Council member **Dennis R. McCoy** ’77, President Tripathi praised the honoree for her investment in the success of the University. Heilman, he said, “exemplifies what it means to be an engaged alumna – a distinguished leader in the legal community who offers an inspiring example to our current and future students and a deeply engaged university citizen who cares passionately about our university and our Law School and has committed herself to actively advancing them.”

The Law School’s interim dean, SUNY Distinguished Professor and Bridgett and Thomas Black Professor, **James A. Gardner**, spoke of Heilman’s accomplishments as a lawyer, as a civic leader on the boards of several non-profit organizations, and at the Law School, where in addition to the Dean’s Advisory Council she serves on the steering committee of the Law School’s



Interim Dean Gardner presenting the Jaeckle Award to Pamela D. Heilman ’75, with UB President Satish K. Tripathi at right.

current fund-raising campaign. “There is a common theme to Pam’s vast volunteer work,” Gardner said. “She builds bridges. She brings people together, and she makes people and organizations stronger. . . . Pamela D. Heilman has been a beacon of inspiration to our Law School community. Her service to the Law School, the University and the legal profession is exemplary and extraordinary.”

In accepting the award, Heilman first gave credit to “two extraordinary parents who raised a girl to believe she could do and achieve anything she chose.” But, she said, that achievement

became possible only because her undergraduate institution, Vassar College, had adopted a standard of need-blind admission, and because the Law School became gender-blind in its own admission policies. The Class of 1974, she noted, included only a dozen women – but in her own Class of ’75, fully one-quarter of the students were women.

Still, Heilman said, it was daunting to apply for a job at Buffalo’s largest law firms. But she found common ground with Hodgson Russ, a firm that she called a pioneer in diversity because it had hired people of all political persuasions and religions. Today, she noted, 23



At left: Pamela D. Heilman '75 and husband Robert Heilman

Below: LAA President Hon. Lenora B. Foote-Beavers '97



Hon. Julio M. Fuentes '75, left, and Harvey L. Kaminski '77



Dennis R. McCoy '77, left, and Terrence M. Gilbride '88



Left to right: Hon. Barbara Howe '80, Pamela D. Heilman '75 and Ellen Yost Lafili '83



percent of Hodgson's equity partners are women, as against the national average in law firms of 16 percent – "even though law schools have been 50-50 for 30 years now."

That commitment to a multiplicity of voices, Heilman said, benefits everyone. "Opportunity and diversity are the hallmarks of justice, making collective decisions by giving voice to all members of society," she said. "They ensure the positive impact of social institutions on health, welfare, community and sustainability, enhancing social cooperation in addressing societal needs."

Those goals, she said, inform the Law

School's mission. "The school's strength in interdisciplinary legal scholarship and teaching should be the focal point for the University's efforts to illuminate questions of justice," Heilman said. "This is the true responsibility of a great public law school and a great public university."

And she challenged those present – "alumni, faculty, administrators and citizens" – to sustain this vision. "The task is more challenging than ever," she said, "as we face dramatic declines of over 50 percent in law school applications nationally and in the overall quality of those applicants. At a time when 51 per-

cent of the students in our nation's public schools come from families in poverty, we need to continue to meet the challenge of being New York's only public law school, to be the place where first-generation lawyers are welcomed and embraced along with students of color. We must stay true to our mission."

Heilman closed with many thanks, most especially to her husband, Bob – "my date for the senior prom" – and "the wonderful journey we have shared with so many of you."